

# Iraq: Falluja's Faustian Bargain

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## *Executive Summary*

As the campaign for Iraq's 30 April parliamentary elections heated up, so too did Falluja. The situation there has taken a dramatic turn for the worse since late 2013 when the army, after a long absence, returned in response to protests around Anbar province. With the troops on the outskirts, the jihadi ISIL within and the city's self-appointed military council trying to walk a fine line between the two, Falluja seems poised to repeat the battles of 2004, when it experienced some of the most intense fighting of the U.S. occupation. The potential for miscalculation, or calculated escalation, is enormous. It is too late for steps that might have been taken to reduce tensions before the elections. Any lasting solution requires addressing the deeper roots of Sunni alienation in a country increasingly gripped by sectarian tension. ISIL's rise is a symptom, not the main cause, of the poor governance that is the principal reason for Iraq's instability. The government, UN and U.S. should treat ISIL differently from the military council and Falluja as a whole, rather than bundling them together in an indiscriminate "war on terror".

When in December 2013 Iraq's central authorities cleared a year-long sit-in in the city that was demanding better treatment from Baghdad, Falluja's residents took to the streets. ISIL (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) took advantage of the ensuing chaos, moved forces into the city and asserted it had seized control. The claim was greatly exaggerated: while it raised its black flag above some administration buildings in the city centre, locals blocked most of their forays and forced them to retreat to the outskirts.

But Baghdad had a *casus belli*: it besieged the city, ignored local attempts to mediate an ISIL withdrawal and threatened to attack. Falluja residents held no brief for ISIL, but their hatred of the Iraqi army – seen as the instrument of a Shiite, sectarian regime, directed from Tehran, that discriminates against Sunnis in general and Anbar in particular – ran even deeper. The city's rebels struck a Faustian bargain, forming an alliance of convenience with ISIL. The jihadis' military might kept the army at bay, but their presence justified the government's claim that the entire city was under jihadi control. A self-reinforcing cycle has taken root: jihadi activity encourages government truculence that in turn requires greater jihadi protection.

Falluja's fighters and Baghdad's central authorities both are posing as the country's true patriots, deriding their adversary as a foreign enemy. ISIL has benefited by renewing its base of support in Iraq, which had been shrinking ever since the *sahwa* (awakening) turned against al-Qaeda in 2006. With a high profile from the fighting in Syria and superior weaponry, they once again have become a magnet for the country's disaffected.

The crisis has rescued Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's chances in the parliamentary elections, which, until ISIL entered the picture, appeared grim. His second term is widely considered a disaster: over the past year, the rising tempo of violence across the country, abuses by the security services, massive floods in the capital and the government's mismanagement of Sunni protests damaged his credibility as a national leader among both Sunnis and Shiites. To save his prospects, he took a page out of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's playbook by exaggerating – and thereby exacerbating – the threat Falluja poses to national stability. It offered more than a

diversion: it was an opportunity to shift the terms of debate, rally Shiites against alleged terrorists, divide and neutralise Sunnis, redeem the army's image as defender of state and nation and lobby the international community – with an often myopic focus on jihadi terrorism – for support.

Al-Qaeda is a serious threat, which is why the government should mobilise all the help it can get. One way to do so and to defuse tension in Anbar, however, would be to distinguish among the elements in the province, in particular between local insurgents with specific grievances and political interests and transnational ISIL jihadis, whose agenda is anathema to the city's residents. With a cohesive corporate identity unique in Anbar, Falluja would prefer to evict the jihadis if guaranteed it would not face regime attack, much as it was almost a decade ago, when the *sahwa* joined with the government. But the prime minister has staked his re-election on an anti-terrorism campaign with a crude sectarian cast; neither he nor any part of the Sunni spectrum is likely to retreat. The Muttahidun electoral list, a predominantly Sunni coalition that initially led protests but is now partially aligned with the government, is as invested in the terrorism narrative as the government; its and Maliki's Sunni adversaries, believing the elections are rigged and they would lose even if they were not, are set to boycott.

The parliamentary elections, at least in Anbar, will not be credible – not only because they are proceeding with the province a virtual war zone, but also because violence, fighting terrorism and a focus on security – the very factors that have undermined the elections – have become integral elements of governance in Iraq. What is needed is a new political compact, something elections are but one way to spur.

The question is what should happen after the poll. In the short term, the government should work with Falluja's military council – which itself should endeavour to repair its relationship with its Sunni rivals – to push ISIL from the city. In the longer term, the violence in and around Falluja should be seen for what it is: a consequence of the state's deep political flaws, not their root cause, that needs to be addressed as such. There is no better or more convenient time to begin to do so than in the wake of the elections, when political horse-trading will be the order of the day.

## *Recommendations*

*To break the cycle of conflict and push ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) from Falluja*

### **To the government of Iraq:**

1. Deal separately with Falluja's military council and ISIL as two distinct actors, deploying a separate strategy for each and encouraging a political rapprochement within the city to facilitate a military campaign to expel ISIL.
2. End actions that might strengthen cooperation between Falluja's military council and ISIL militants, including siege, curfew, attacks against city infrastructure (eg, hospital, residential areas) and intimidation.
3. Encourage reconciliation within Falluja to facilitate the expulsion of ISIL by inter alia:
  - a) refraining from pitting one faction against the other (eg, by co-opting tribal *sahwat* (plural of *sahwa*, awakening) councils or political groups against the military council);
  - b) approving a new mayor and new police chief, as selected by Falluja's military council and Muttahidun-affiliated members; and
  - c) providing military and technical assistance to the new mayor, police chief and *sahwat* to expel ISIL from the city;
  - d) allowing in humanitarian groups and foreign journalists;

### **To Falluja's Military Council and Muttahidun representatives from Falluja:**

4. Engage each other with the goal of, inter alia, agreeing on a new mayor and police chief for the city.
5. Conduct a joint operation to expel ISIL from Falluja, involving police, military council and *sahwat* councils and demand that the central government provide the necessary military and technical assistance.

### **To the UN Secretary-General and UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI):**

6. Refrain from indiscriminately employing the term "terrorism" to refer to both Falluja's military council and ISIL militants.
7. Establish contact with Falluja's military council members and insist that the government of Iraq:
  - a) tailor its military operations narrowly to target ISIL only and refrain from indiscriminate or wider attacks on the city;
  - b) end the siege of Falluja; and
  - c) ease access to and operations within the city

8. Facilitate negotiations between Falluja's military council and local representatives of the Muttahidun electoral list and insist that the Iraq government recognise the outcome of these talks.

**To the U.S. government:**

9. Halt military support to the government of Iraq until it commits to full accounting for its use of that support.
10. Support the formation of a governance body that includes all Falluja's local factions (excluding ISIL); and, in particular, encourage negotiations between the city's military council and local members of the Muttahidun electoral list.

*For long-term stability in Anbar after the 2014 parliamentary elections*

**To the Sunni political parties:**

11. Prioritise reestablishing the province's trust in the national political process by inter alia:
  - a) negotiating with other political forces a role in national security institutions, so as to influence the selection and appointment of army commanders in the province (eg, the Anbar Operation Commander, head of division);
  - b) boosting the authority of Anbar's provincial bodies in the management of its political and security affairs (eg, selection of police chief and management of security, management of resources), by fully implementing the Provincial Powers Act (2008); and
  - c) encouraging coordination between political and tribal leaders of different political factions at the provincial, district and sub-district level to prepare a political and security strategy for Anbar province and a more inclusive local leadership.

**Baghdad/Brussels, 28 April 2014**

# Iraq: Falluja's Faustian Bargain

## I. Introduction

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On 30 December 2013, the central government in Baghdad cracked down on the protests that had been ongoing for over a year in Falluja and Sunni Arab localities around Iraq. Protest leader and parliamentarian Ahmed al-Alwani was arrested on terrorism charges, as several other Sunni politicians had been over the past two years. Bulldozers cleared a sit-in in neighbouring Ramadi, the capital of Anbar province.<sup>1</sup> The unrest that subsequently exploded in Falluja<sup>2</sup> opened a space for al-Qaeda militants, operating under the banner of the newly-branded Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL),<sup>3</sup> to enter the city. Local police abandoned their posts: fleeing, laying down their weapons or otherwise keeping a low profile.<sup>4</sup>

With characteristic bravado, ISIL claimed to have seized control of the city, but in fact it was in no position to do so. Its forays into Falluja were limited and met with immediate local pushback. Nonetheless, government troops surrounded the city and threatened to take it by force, setting the stage for a prolonged standoff.

Falluja residents do not like ISIL, but their hatred of the army – which they see as the instrument of a Shiite, sectarian regime that discriminates against Sunnis in general and Anbar in particular – is greater. The city began to organise what it considered self-defence against the regime; since ISIL could help keep the army at bay, it formed a tacit alliance with the jihadis, allowing them to operate in the city. A fighter from Falluja said:

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<sup>1</sup> This report uses the government administrative unit terms “province” and “governorate” interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> See Crisis Group Middle East Report N°144, *Make or Break: Iraq's Sunnis and the State*, 14 August 2013, p. 2. When Falluja erupted in December 2013, the army already had left. At the beginning of 2013, it and federal police had withdrawn in order to calm the situation after clashing violently with protesters. Local police were the only security force in the city. On the killings during the protests, see “Iraq: Investigate Deadly Army Shooting in Fallujah”, Human Rights Watch, 14 February 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Qaeda has had various incarnations in Iraq. As of 2003, the group – led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who pledged allegiance to Osama bin Laden the next year – went by the name Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (Monotheism and Jihad Group), and later Tandhim al-Qaeda fi Bilad al-Rafidayn (al-Qaeda in Iraq, AQI). After Zarqawi's death in 2006, his successor, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, founded Dawlat al-Iraq al-Islamiya (Islamic State of Iraq, ISI), and continued to pay tribute to al-Qaeda's historical leadership. Crisis Group Middle East Reports N°50, *In Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency*, 15 February 2006 and N°74, *Iraq After the Surge I: The New Sunni Landscape*, 30 April 2008. In April 2013, he disowned al-Qaeda's central leadership and established another organisation, al-Dawla al-Islamiya fil-Iraq wal-Sham (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), operating in western Anbar and across the border in Syria.

<sup>4</sup> Since reestablishment in 2003, the Iraqi army and the federal, paramilitary police have remained deployed in urban centres due to the fragile security situation. They operate under defence and interior ministry authority respectively, with recruits from around the country. Police, by contrast, use local recruits who operate in their immediate environment, reporting to both interior ministry and provincial authorities. On army, federal and local police deployments, see Maria Fantappie, “Contested Consolidation of Power”, Carnegie Paper, February 2013.

We want to protect the city from [Prime Minister] Nouri al-Maliki's army. We will not allow it to re-enter the city, ever. Falluja is a city of resistance. We resisted the American occupation, and today we fight an Iranian occupation.<sup>5</sup>

The Iraqi government saw matters quite differently, as a straightforward battle against terrorism. A member of Maliki's State of Law coalition, asked to distinguish the residents of Falluja from al-Qaeda, responded: "It seems there is no difference. Falluja is in the hands of Daash [Arabic acronym for ISIL], often carrying a negative connotation], and if the tribes will not deliver the combatants, the military solution is on the table".<sup>6</sup> This truculent stance damaged the prospects for political accommodation.<sup>7</sup> The central authorities lionised the Sunni Arab tribes and officials who sided with them and labelled those who expressed discontent, regardless of their position toward ISIL, as traitors.<sup>8</sup> Since January the government has besieged Falluja, shelled it, and repeatedly announced that an assault was imminent.<sup>9</sup>

Developments in Falluja have been a boon to the prime minister's electoral prospects. He was in serious trouble prior to the crisis; the tangled web of political alliances that had kept him in power for two terms were looking increasingly fragile as the 30 April parliamentary elections approached. The crisis created an opportunity for Baghdad to position itself as the nation's saviour, protecting it from foreign terrorists bent on wrecking its precarious stability.

The war-on-terror narrative, in which criticising al-Maliki is tantamount to endorsing al-Qaeda,<sup>10</sup> has diverted attention from the uprising's fundamentally political character.<sup>11</sup> Government discourse with both domestic audiences and international

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<sup>5</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, Falluja fighter, 10 January 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 12 January 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Militaristic discourse in Baghdad has risen in tandem with Falluja tensions. On 31 December, Iraqiya TV, a popular, pro-government channel, gave significant time to reviewing aircraft the army bought "to fight terrorists" in Anbar. On 6 and 8 January, Iraq celebrated Army Day and Police Day, respectively. Pictures of armed servicemen lined Baghdad's streets, and helicopters overflew daily. Crisis Group observations, Baghdad, January 2014. On Army Day, Maliki said, "Iraq is the first [country] to have encountered terrorism and broken the back of al-Qaeda. Terrorism has benefited from [instability] in surrounding Arab countries and made a comeback. But the Iraqi army, police and tribes are up to this challenge". *Al-Iraq News*, 9 January 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Praising Sunni tribes fighting beside the army, Maliki stated in his weekly address to the nation: "Look at the army and the tribes who are fighting side by side against al-Qaeda's murderers. This is real national unity". *Al-Iraq News*, 13 January 2014.

<sup>9</sup> The army has controlled the southern outskirts, leaving the northern Saqlawya district as sole access. Strikes have focused on the suburbs: Naymiya (in the south), Saqlawya (north west), Marzraa and Gurma (north east). They also targeted a hospital in the central-eastern area, forcing personnel to leave. In late January the government cut off electricity in Falluja and most other Anbar cities. Crisis Group observations, Anbar, January-February 2014. Suadad al-Salhi, "Iraqi army bombards Falluja in preparation for ground assault", Reuters, 2 February 2014.

<sup>10</sup> A member of Maliki's Daawa party said, "when dealing with al-Qaeda terrorists you cannot draw any distinction between good ones and bad ones. All are bad and need to be confronted". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 12 January 2014. The former secretary of the Sadrists' al-Ahrar bloc, a Shiite competitor with Maliki's party, commented: "The government created a situation where no matter whether you are Sunni or Shiite, if you don't support Maliki, it means you support al-Qaeda". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 14 January 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Anger had spilled out in Sunni Arab areas as early as December 2012. Ramadi, the capital of Anbar province, had a sit-in. Tribal leaders, clerics and member of the Sunni-dominated Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) voiced deep-rooted, popular frustration. For an overview of protest movement origins and government reluctance to consider its demands seriously, see Crisis Group Report, *Make or Break*, op. cit.

interlocutors portrays the Falluja unrest purely as a security challenge. An official with close ties to the government echoed many of his colleagues:

Terrorism is not an Iraqi problem but an international one, threatening not just the region, but Europe and the U.S. too. They must assume their responsibilities in the struggle against terror and provide Iraq with the financial and moral support it needs to confront this threat.<sup>12</sup>

By denying journalists and diplomats access to Falluja,<sup>13</sup> the government has made it difficult for them to sort rumour from fact, creating a knowledge gap that has helped the official narrative take root.

The jihadi resurgence in Anbar has made for strange bedfellows. The U.S. administration, while paying lip-service to the need for reconciliation, has given Maliki strong support,<sup>14</sup> successfully pushing back against congressional concerns about increasing military aid at a time of sectarian polarisation.<sup>15</sup> U.S. aid did not change

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<sup>12</sup> Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 11 January 2014. He added: "I was worried when I heard that Spain had arrested Daash [Arabic acronym for ISIL] militants coming from Iraq. Al-Qaeda is not a local organisation but an international organisation with worldwide reach. This is not an Iraqi problem. Very soon Europe will confront this issue". Government officials appealed to international partners. On 5 January, Maliki called on the UN Security Council for a clear statement "in support of Iraq's battle against terrorism". Iraq Media Net, 5 January 2014. He asked EU representatives in Baghdad for support, because "Iraq is fighting as a proxy for Europe in the war against terror". Crisis Group interview, European diplomat, Baghdad, 7 January 2014. He also authored "A Comprehensive Strategy Against Terrorism", *Foreign Policy* (online), 18 February 2014. On 12-13 March, the Iraqi government gathered political and security analysts in Baghdad to discuss counter-terrorism strategies at the "First International Counter-Terrorism Conference". Crisis Group observation, Baghdad, 12 March 2014.

<sup>13</sup> No international media has been allowed to report from Falluja. A BBC reporter in Baghdad said, "We know little of what is happening in Falluja. We tried to embed with the Iraqi army troops around Falluja, but it wasn't possible. As soon as we got to Abu Ghraib [on Baghdad's outskirts], an Iraqi army convoy blocked us at the entrance of Anbar province". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 14 January 2014. Since January 2013, the Iraqi Red Crescent (IRC) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) are the only relief organisations allowed to operate in Falluja, and they are restricted. An ICRC convoy was allowed to enter to distribute food, blankets and hygiene products, but only once and for a few hours. Crisis Group interview, ICRC employee, Baghdad, 17 January 2014. Majda Flihi, the ICRC staff member who led the mission, said on 28 January, "Falluja is deserted yet not abandoned. The humanitarian situation is dire. People are moving about inside the city in search of a safe haven. Children cannot go to school anymore. The city lacks basic goods such as food and milk formulas for babies, and hospitals are unable to cope with the large number of wounded patients". "Iraq: Bringing Urgently Need Help to Civilians in Falluja", ICRC news release, [www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/news-release/2014/01-28-iraq-violence-assistance.htm](http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/news-release/2014/01-28-iraq-violence-assistance.htm).

<sup>14</sup> A U.S. official said the U.S. was supporting "a legitimate and elected government in the struggle against terrorism". Asked if it could monitor the use of its military aid, he said, "Since we withdrew from Iraq, ... we have an incomplete picture of what is happening. But we keep contacts with Sunni leaders in Anbar, and we know that the government is making efforts to deliver weapons to [Sunni] tribal leaders and is pressuring the army to cooperate with the local police forces". Crisis Group interview, Washington, 26 February 2014.

<sup>15</sup> In November 2008, the U.S. and Iraq signed a Strategic Framework for Relationship on Friendship and Cooperation (SOFA) that requires Washington to give Iraq military assistance to "deter all threats against its security, sovereignty and territorial integrity". Unrest in Falluja, where U.S. troops incurred their greatest losses during the occupation, began on the second anniversary of the December 2011 U.S. withdrawal. As it escalated, it fuelled criticism of the U.S. decision to accelerate its military pullout and put pressure on Congress to honour the commitment. Some members of Congress opposed delivery of weapons, arguing that the standoff appeared to be a sectarian clash,

the balance of forces, but it served as a powerful symbolic endorsement of the government's narrative and its military operations in Anbar. Washington's chief regional rival, Tehran, has lined up with it, offering Baghdad political support and military assistance.<sup>16</sup> The UN Security Council and UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) also endorsed and backed the government's struggle against terrorism, perfunctorily calling for political measures and shunning criticism of its heavy-handed approach.<sup>17</sup> Falluja has offered Maliki a rare opportunity to solidify support among both Iraqis and the outside world. With little to show for his second term, parliamentary elections imminent and a third term in the balance, he has exaggerated and thus worsened the threat Falluja poses to Iraqi stability.

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not a counterterrorism operation. At stake was scheduled provision of hellfire missiles, aerial vehicles, surveillance drones and F-16 airplanes. Richard Sisk, "US to ramp up arms deliveries to Iraq", *Daily News*, 6 January 2014. On 26 January, Congress lifted its hold on the sale of 24 AH-64 Apache helicopters "to provide Iraq with a critical capability to protect itself from terrorism". Defense Security Cooperation Agency, Defense Department news release. In March, the U.S. embassy said the U.S. had delivered 100 Hellfire missiles, more than 11 million rounds of ammunition, thousands of machine guns and rifles and thousands of flares, grenades and other weapons. "U.S. ships arms to aid fight against Islamists militants in Iraq", *The Guardian*, 16 March 2014. For background on the arms deals, see [www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS21968.pdf](http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS21968.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> On Iran's offer of military support and advice, see "سردار حجازی: ایران برای کمک مشاوره‌ای یا "تجهیزاتی به عراق آماده است" [General Hejazi: Iran is ready to provide equipment or advice for Iraq], *Jomhouri Islami*, 5 January 2014. Reuters reported that by the time Maliki returned the previous November from lobbying Washington for more weapons, Iran had signed a deal to sell \$195 million of arms and ammunition. Ahmed Rasheed, "Exclusive: Iraq signs deal to buy arms, ammunition from Iran – documents", Reuters, 24 February 2014. A former Iranian official said, "we don't want Iraq to depend on America for its stability. We want to make sure that Iraq can stand on its own feet. I don't know what Iran has offered to Iraq in terms of equipment and technology, but our military forces are cooperating closely". Crisis Group telephone interview, 21 January 2014. The Iranian Ambassador, Hassan Danaie-far, described the Iraqi government's fight in Falluja as part of a larger, Iranian-led struggle against radicalism and its alleged sponsors (Saudi Arabia and Qatar) and the U.S. as a partner in the war against terror: "Radicalism is pervading the region .... Iran will support all governments that join the struggle against terrorism. Iraq, Russia, the U.S. have indeed joined us in this position". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 17 January 2014.

<sup>17</sup> The Security Council denounced "terrorist acts" affecting the country. After turmoil erupted in Falluja, it again deplored terrorism, though also stressing the importance of "continued national dialogue", an "inclusive political process" and the "holding of free and fair elections in April 2014". UN Security Council Press Statement on Violence, 25 November 2013, and Statement by the President of the Security Council on the Situation in Anbar, 10 January 2014.

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## II. Round Two in Falluja: Sectarian Polarisation

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From late 2012 to late 2013, Sunni Arabs staged demonstrations against what they considered discriminatory practices against their community. Their demands included better representation of Sunnis in state institutions; reintegration of army officers allegedly dismissed for sectarian reasons; the end of arrests on unsubstantiated terrorism charges; and withdrawal of the central government's security forces from Sunni-populated areas. Baghdad showed little interest in compromise. It reacted with lethal force in the Kirkuk governorate town of Hawija;<sup>18</sup> elsewhere it isolated elements of the opposition with a mixture of co-optation and repression.

As the demonstrations slowly dwindled, divisions deepened within what remains a multifaceted protest movement.<sup>19</sup> In particular, the Muttahidun electoral list, led by parliament speaker Osama al-Nujayfi and affiliated with the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), gradually abandoned the demands it had led in formulating and joined the government's fold. Protest leader Ahmed Abu Risha, who heads the *sahwat* (awakening in plural) councils of Sunni tribesmen that confronted al-Qaeda during the U.S. occupation, followed suit, urging renewed cooperation against the jihadis.<sup>20</sup> In parallel, violence grew. Bombing of civilians, routinely ascribed to al-Qaeda although likely the work of multiple perpetrators, multiplied around the country.<sup>21</sup> Al-Qaeda's resurgence, particularly near the Syrian border, led the government to intensify army operations in Sunni Arab areas, ramp up arrests on terrorism charges and accelerate executions of the convicted.<sup>22</sup>

In the government's telling, the violence is a spillover from the civil war in Syria<sup>23</sup> – a narrative that, while correct in certain important ways, overlooks the radicalising

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<sup>18</sup> See Crisis Group Conflict Alert, "Iraq After Hawija: Recovery or Relapse?", 26 April 2013.

<sup>19</sup> For background, see Crisis Group Report, *Make or Break*, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>20</sup> Muttahidun dominated the April 2013 elections in Anbar governorate, claiming the governorship and nine of 26 council seats. It then moved closer to the central government, aiming to become the primary Sunni Arab group after the 2014 parliamentary elections. It championed negotiations with Baghdad, improved local police-army cooperation and reestablishment of the *sahwa*. The newly nominated governor, Ahmed Khalaf Dheyabi, said, "only a moderate and centrist position can bridge the divide between the government and Anbar protesters. There is a need for practical steps to hamper the rise of al-Qaeda. We want to open a serious dialogue with the federal government, bridge the gaps between the Anbar police and the army, and reactivate the *sahwa*. Already 6,000 of their former members have registered in Anbar". Crisis Group interview, Ramadi, 10 November 2013.

<sup>21</sup> According to UNAMI, violence picked up after government forces cracked down on the Hawija sit-in. The monthly death toll increased from 456 in March to 712 in April and 1,057 in July. For an account of fatalities in 2013, see Musings on Iraq, "Over 8,000 killed in Iraq so far in 2013", <http://musingsoniraq.blogspot.com/2013/12/over-8000-killed-in-iraq-so-far-in-2013.html>, 3 December 2013.

<sup>22</sup> Between June and August 2013, the army's Anbar Operation Command launched several operations in the province's western desert area, around Rawa. In September, the Badya and Jazeera Operation Command (BJOC), formed from the 7th and 11th army divisions, was tasked with operations against ISIL in western Anbar. See *al-Iraq News*, June-December 2013. The results reportedly were unimpressive. When ISIL seized Rawa on 23 September, "the army remained a spectator to the events and did not engage in combat until the next day, at which point ISIL chose to evacuate its fighters anyway". Crisis Group interview, Rawa, 27 September 2013. On arrests and executions, see "Iraq: Executions Surge but No Actions on Reform", 25 April 2013, and "Executions Do Not Make Iraq Safe", 11 October 2013, both Human Rights Watch.

<sup>23</sup> In an interview, al-Maliki said: "Terrorism in Iraq is rooted in the rise of regional sectarianism and directly related to the developments in the Syrian crisis and its repercussions on the Iraqi arena. We are very worried about the Syrian arena transforming into a field that attracts extremists, ter-

impact of Baghdad's own policies in stirring up sectarian sentiment and facilitating the influx of Shiite jihadis to fight on behalf of the regime in Damascus.<sup>24</sup> Instability in Syria and Iraq has deepened in parallel: the war against the Assad regime provided al-Qaeda with both a rallying cry and a venue for mobilisation, enabling it to add recruits and augment its resources.<sup>25</sup> In Iraq, the unrest has revived its popular base. Stalemate protests, a lack of political options and suffocating repression radicalised a new fringe and seemingly validated armed struggle as a credible – indeed the only – form of opposition.

After Sunni lawmaker Ahmed al-Alwani was arrested,<sup>26</sup> the government agreed with Anbar local officials to clear the sit-in from Ramadi, where the protest movement was headquartered.<sup>27</sup> This prompted street demonstrations there and in Falluja, creating an opening for ISIL to infiltrate the two cities. Its fighters, who had long adopted a low profile and avoided urban centres, emerged into the open. Residents, who feared and loathed both al-Qaeda and the government, were presented with an acute dilemma.

Ramadi and Falluja resisted ISIL in different ways. Ramadi ultimately prioritised the fight against al-Qaeda. As ISIL started attacking it,<sup>28</sup> the town's Muttahidun-affiliated political leadership called upon residents to cooperate with the army. The police and most of Ramadi's tribes, sensing gathering opposition to the jihadis and unwillingness to confront their kin, followed suit. With some residents fighting on

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rorists and sectarians from various part of the world, gathering them in our neighbourhood", Al-Monitor.com, 7 October 2013.

<sup>24</sup> Shiite foreign volunteers cross to Syria via government border points: Baghdad airport and the al-Walid land crossing. For background on the government's support to the Syrian regime, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°143, *Syria's Metastasising Conflict*, 27 June 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Since June 2013, ISIL has operated in the south-eastern Anbar towns Rutba and Rawa, on a strategic road to Syria. It has also been active in Haditha and Haqlaniya, in the north west on roads to Mosul and Salaheddine. Crisis Group observations, Anbar, June–December 2013.

<sup>26</sup> BBC Middle East, 29 December 2013. Government security forces ended the third consecutive year by targeting a prominent Sunni leader. In December 2011, Vice President Tareq al-Hashimi fled murder charges. In December 2012, security forces stormed the residency of then-Finance Minister Rafea al-Issawi, arresting several of his guards accused of terrorist activities. Accounts of Alwani's arrest from government officials and locals differ sharply. The former describe a successful army raid; the latter decry an unlawful assault by a Shiite militia. Saad al-Mutlabi, a member of Maliki's State of Law coalition said, "the Golden Brigades of the Iraqi Army went to the house of Alwani to arrest his brother who was accused of terrorism. As they entered, Alwani opened fire, killing four of our boys, so he was arrested as well". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 10 January 2014. A Ramadi resident said the militia Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq "entered Ramadi, arrested Ahmad al-Alwani and killed his brothers and guards". Crisis Group telephone interview, 10 January 2013.

<sup>27</sup> On 29 December, Saadoun al-Dulaimi, acting defence minister, agreed with provincial authorities (dominated by Muttahidun) and local tribes on the sit-in's removal, specifying it could be reestablished in a less sensitive place. Alwani was to be released and central government forces (army and federal police) were to quit cities, leaving local police in control. This was meant to defuse the conflict. On 30 December, troops withdrew, but other terms were not implemented. Suhair al-Rawi, a provincial council member, complained: "We tried to negotiate and bridge protesters and government but Baghdad broke the agreement. They left us disarmed in the face of this situation". Crisis Group telephone interview, 12 January 2014.

<sup>28</sup> In the first two weeks of January ISIL fighters encircled Ramadi, attacked the neighbouring areas of Sawfiya, Albu Obaid, Albu Bali, Albu Farraj and seized partial control of the main road to Baghdad (Road 60). Their activity reached as far as the city's southern residential areas of Hayy al-Dhubbat and Hayy al-Malaab. Crisis Group observations, Anbar, January 2014.

their own and the others joining with the army,<sup>29</sup> al-Qaeda was pushed back. A Ramadi resident said, “now that al-Qaeda is everywhere, we need the government as an ally to face this immediate threat”.<sup>30</sup>

The story was different in Falluja. When ISIL fighters entered the city centre and raised their flags over administration buildings on 30 December,<sup>31</sup> they encountered no resistance. Rather than directly confront the militants, locals took control of the city's access points, interposing themselves between the army and the jihadis while attempting to negotiate ISIL's departure.<sup>32</sup> With both ISIL and the army hunkered down, the besieged city centre emptied: police deserted their posts, and many thousands fled, fearing an onslaught.<sup>33</sup> Falluja's former army officers, tribes and clerics established the Military Council of Tribal Revolutionaries in Falluja (al-Majlis al-Askari li-Thuwwar al-Asha'ir fil-Falluja), to administer the abandoned city.

The government did not reply positively to the city's attempt to mediate an end to the standoff. Instead it intensified both its shelling and vitriol, pushing local armed groups to ally with ISIL to hold back an army offensive. In the government's view, cooperation between locals and al-Qaeda confirmed that the city was under militant control. For Falluja's armed residents, the regional and wider international support lavished on the central government appeared to substantiate their sense they were facing a Tehran-controlled Shiite crescent intent on subordinating Sunnis.<sup>34</sup> From this perspective, Baghdad, Tehran, Damascus and even Washington merged into a single enemy. A fighter in Falluja said, “the Iraqi army fires U.S. weapons, relies on

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<sup>29</sup> In Ramadi and its neighbouring areas, most tribes fought beside the army against ISIL. In Khaleidiya, a town on Road 60 between Falluja and Ramadi, local tribes fighting with the army expelled ISIL fighters. In Ramadi's outskirts, Abu Alwan, Abu Fahad, Abu Farraj and Abu Obeid, tribal fighters, helped by the army, evicted ISIL. Abu Alwan's main clan split: one faction stood with the army against ISIL; the other fought both. Crisis Group observation, January 2014.

<sup>30</sup> Reflecting such pragmatism, a tribal leader whom Crisis Group first met among demonstrators in Ramadi in March 2013 said, “tribes in Anbar are divided .... You have those fighting with the government and those siding with the armed groups. In front of al-Qaeda, we cannot but side with the government. Joining the other camp is just too risky”. Crisis Group telephone interview, 12 January 2014.

<sup>31</sup> According to local accounts, ISIL fighters drove into Falluja using megaphones to call on residents to pledge allegiance. They took control of the police stations, appropriated weapons, seized documents and raised al-Qaeda's black flag.

<sup>32</sup> In particular, city residents took control of the strategic Baghdad highway and Falluja's eastern neighbourhoods of Gurma and Muaskar al-Masraa. On 31 December, these were retaken by the army, which pushed the armed residents to negotiate ISIL's peaceful withdrawal. Crisis Group telephone interviews, 6-15 January 2014. ISIL relocated to the southern neighbourhoods of Naymyia, Ameryiat al-Falluja and northern Saqlawiyia. A Sunni government employee said: “ISIL was in Falluja but isn't anymore. It exited ... and repositioned in the outskirts”. Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 9 January 2013. Mustafa Habib, “Out the Back Door: The Secret Deal with Anbar Tribes Sees al-Qaeda Leave Falluja”, *Niqash*, 9 January 2013.

<sup>33</sup> Iraq's displacement and migration ministry reported that as of 6 March at least 14,100 of the nearly 72,000 families displaced in Anbar province had fled from Falluja alone. Crisis Group correspondence, UNAMI, 11 March 2014.

<sup>34</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, 13 January 2014. An ex-senior army officer, claiming Iranians in the Iraqi army, said, “the Iranian army will come here to invade the city to kill its sons!” Crisis Group telephone interview, 13 January 2014. Another, suspicious of the army, said, “the army is sectarian. It has been behaving with us as if we are all terrorists. They raid homes without respect for the [tribal] elders. They accuse all young people in their twenties and thirties of being al-Qaeda. They come here saying they are protecting these areas from terrorists from Syria, but in reality they are facilitating the Iraqi government's support to the government in Damascus”. Crisis Group interview, Falluja resident, al-Qaim, 17 October 2014.

Iranian brainpower and replicates Assad's strategy. Maliki is one point on a line that extends from Tehran to Damascus.<sup>35</sup> Falluja's armed residents were determined to keep the army at bay, even if it meant allying with ISIL.

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<sup>35</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, January 2014.

### III. The View from Falluja

#### A. Past as Prologue

Confrontation with outsiders is nothing new for Falluja, which prides itself for standing up to the British Mandate.<sup>36</sup> Its relations with Saddam Hussein's regime were complex and often fraught. While it had a reputation as a regime stronghold because of the many senior officers who came from there, it endured a harsh crackdown when security forces moved against its Muslim Brotherhood members in the 1970s. When alleged coup plotters were discovered among the city's senior officers in the 1990s, the regime exacted harsh retribution.<sup>37</sup> That same decade, Baghdad's campaign to suppress jihadi Salafism took a toll on the city.<sup>38</sup>

Intense clashes with U.S. troops after the 2003 invasion prefigured the current travails. Residents resented the dismantling of the national army and the firing of its officers, as well as the aggressive behaviour of U.S. troops and contractors, who established a highly disruptive security presence in and around the city centre.<sup>39</sup> Falluja came to see itself as a symbol of growing resistance to the occupation;<sup>40</sup> the U.S. identified the city as a safe-haven for pro-Saddam and jihadi terrorists. This self-reinforcing dynamic climaxed in a 2004 U.S. onslaught that destroyed neighbourhoods, crippled infrastructure and caused two thirds of the population to flee.<sup>41</sup>

Falluja nursed its grievances. Though the government was able to co-opt a narrow subset of its leading figures through business deals, political alliances and *sahwat* councils, it by and large neglected the city, giving rise to a sense of victimhood and persecution. Other Sunni areas suffered similarly, though none as much. Ecological and sanitary disasters arising from the fighting were never addressed; most locals were not fully compensated for the loss of property;<sup>42</sup> and the massive use of highly

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<sup>36</sup> A tribal leader from Falluja, discussing reasons for his opposition to the government, described how his city's tradition of resistance against "oppressive and unjust outsider power" ran back to the time of the British Mandate. Crisis Group interview, Ramadi, March 2013.

<sup>37</sup> See David Baran, *Vivre la tyrannie et lui survivre. L'Irak en transition* (Paris, 2004).

<sup>38</sup> Falluja's tribes were both co-opted and repressed. The Albu Nimr tribe engaged in reprisal killings with the regime. At one stage, a member was assassinated and his body reportedly returned in pieces to family. During the 1990s, the regime tried to contain or eliminate Salafi circles emerging in the city. Peter Harling, "The Falluja Syndrome: Taking the Fight to the Enemy that Wasn't", Joint Advanced Warfighting School, fall 2006, pp. 26-31.

<sup>39</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the U.S. invasion, 700 military personnel, including U.S. soldiers and private contractors, were based in Falluja's city centre, in a former Baath party headquarters and elementary school. In an infamous April 2003 episode, U.S. troops fired on protesters said to have displayed portraits of Saddam Hussein, killing seventeen. Human Rights Watch, "Violent Response: The U.S. Army in al-Falluja", 17 June 2003.

<sup>40</sup> For a detailed description of the Falluja insurgency, see Crisis Group Reports, *In Their Own Words* and *Iraq After the Surge I*, both op. cit.

<sup>41</sup> The 2004 offensive destroyed 70 per cent of the city's infrastructure including 36,000 buildings, 8,400 shops, three pipelines for water purification and two electricity stations. When civilians returned, U.S. forces tracked them with fingerprints and iris scanners. Each had to show a U.S.-issued personal biometric ID card when entering or exiting the city. "Compensation For Falluja Residents Slow-Locals", IRIN, 4 April 2005, at [www.irinnews.org/report/24995/iraq-compensation-for-fallujah-residents-slow-locals](http://www.irinnews.org/report/24995/iraq-compensation-for-fallujah-residents-slow-locals).

<sup>42</sup> As of 2005, the U.S. coalition had allocated \$100 million for reconstruction, and the Iraqi government had approved a plan to compensate locals who had lost property with \$1,500 each. Resources were distributed slowly and unevenly, mostly through *sahwa* leaders who cooperated with U.S.

polluting weapons is suspected of having precipitated a sharp increase of cancer and birth defects.<sup>43</sup> By the time Baghdad's army returned to repress the protests in December 2012, the city's residents saw it as no less of an occupying force than the one it had fought a decade earlier. A fighter in Falluja explained his reaction in precisely those terms:

Ten years have passed. In 2004 we were under attack by the U.S. army. Today we are under attack by the Iraqi army. Now we fear that they will invade under the pretext that Daash [ISIL] is controlling the city.<sup>44</sup> What passes for an Iraqi army in fact is not; it is an Iranian army fighting with U.S. weapons. I took up weapons in defence of the Sunnis that Maliki wants to wipe out. We are determined to prevent his forces from entering the city.<sup>45</sup>

In 2014, the Iraqi government has come to be seen in Falluja as a sectarian, Shiite occupation no less pernicious and imperial than its U.S. predecessor. Now as then, residents view themselves as the guardian of national dignity, this time standing up against those pursuing an Iranian agenda.<sup>46</sup> A former army officer from the city said, "the resistance did not achieve its goals. America handed over Iraq to Iran and the Shiites. Today we must seize the opportunity to liberate Iraq from the Iranian presence, once and for all!"<sup>47</sup> A decade after its virtual destruction, the city is besieged and defiant, its most insular tendencies reinforced.

## B. *A Tenuous Unity*

Falluja has a strong identity and sense of pride. Its society is both deeply conservative and significantly diverse. Proximity to Baghdad has fostered a large, educated urban class of civil servants and army officers, who joined the city's vibrant religious establishment and partook of its tradition of trade and entrepreneurship. These characteristics set Falluja apart from tribally-dominated Ramadi and the rest of Anbar; unlike tribal leaders, who have proven relatively easy to co-opt and play off against each other,<sup>48</sup> Falluja's elites have formed into a cohesive local leadership, demonstrating a substantial degree of self-reliance.<sup>49</sup>

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forces and profited from the reconstruction and compensation. Ibid and Dahr Jamail, "The New Falluja Up Close and Ugly", *Asia Times*, 14 February 2009.

<sup>43</sup> Media reports have highlighted suspected links between the heavy military operations and rates of cancer and birth defects. See, for instance, *The Independent*, 24 July 2014.

<sup>44</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, Falluja, 14 January 2014.

<sup>45</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, member of Falluja military council, 10 January 2014.

<sup>46</sup> A 30-year-old college graduate from Falluja, working as a taxi driver, said in October 2013: "Since the U.S. occupation we [in Falluja] have never felt, not for a minute, that we are Iraqi citizens enjoying our rights. Our sense of injustice is increasing day by day. Sit-ins have been ongoing for a full year, and the government has not responded. Instead it has intensified the sectarian practice of arresting us just for being Sunni Arabs". Crisis Group telephone interview, 10 October 2013.

<sup>47</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, 16 January 2013.

<sup>48</sup> Across Anbar and in other predominantly Sunni Arab provinces, tribes were key to the government's success in implementing a divide-and-rule strategy. Tribes lobby the central authorities for resources, giving Baghdad significant leverage. When *sahwa* head Abu Richa sided with the anti-government protests, for example, the government funded a "new *sahwa*", appointing rival tribal figures Wissam al-Hardan and Mohammed al-Hayes as its leaders. Crisis Group Report, *Make or Break*, op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>49</sup> Feurat al-Alani, a journalist from Falluja said, "throughout its history Falluja has benefited from and competed with Baghdad. Falluja's army officers [and] notables would travel to the capital dur-

Other rebellious Sunni Arab localities cracked under government pressure, but Falluja banded together. Reflecting the spirit behind the Military Council of Tribal Revolutionaries in Falluja,<sup>50</sup> a member said:

We are able to run the city and, at a later stage, will run [Anbar] province in order to serve the interests of the people. But first we are determined to prevent Maliki's forces from entering the city, and will not accept anything that is imposed on us from Baghdad.<sup>51</sup>

This initiative was emulated in other parts of the country, including Ramadi, Mosul, Kirkuk and Baaquba, giving rise to a national body, the General Military Council of Iraqi Revolutionaries (al-Majlis al-Askari al-Amm li-Thuwwar al-Iraq), composed of individual councils in various cities.<sup>52</sup> However, doomed by local rivalries, only Falluja's endured. Elsewhere tribes split along pro- and anti-government lines. The Albu Fahad tribe of Ramadi, for instance, was divided between its leadership, which stood with the government, and its members, who tended to support the opposition. In Haditha and Hit, where ISIL has a strong presence, the dominant clans of Albu Nimr and al-Jughaifa joined revived *sahwat* councils, sponsored by Baghdad. Two other clans established an opposition-affiliated military council, but it did not garner much strength.<sup>53</sup>

The contrast with Falluja's cohesiveness could not be greater. The city's unity does not stem from its homogeneity; its military council is a blend of backgrounds and ideologies. Tribal leaders<sup>54</sup> and clerics participate alongside senior army officers who fought the U.S. occupation. The council also includes former members of the Baath, an ostensibly secular party that monopolised political representation under Saddam Hussein, and an array of Islamist armed groups ranging from the pragmatic to the more hardline (the 1920 Revolution Brigades, the Naqshabandi Army and the Islamic Army).<sup>55</sup> These elements espouse different, sometimes competing, agendas. Former army officers and tribal figures, for instance, tend to advocate strong Iraqi unity, while Islamic army militants and Salafist clerics back establishment of a Sunni

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ing the day and go back to Falluja at night. Baghdad's skills and knowledge nurtured Falluja's urban leadership, and this same leadership plotted against Baghdad". Crisis Group telephone interview, 9 March 2014.

<sup>50</sup> The council controls the city's central districts (Hay al-Muallimin, Hay al-Askary and Hay al-Shuhada) and key entrances to the city, eg, north Saqlawiya, south Nuaymiah and Gurma Anaz, which also lead to Baghdad. Its strength in any given location is a function of local tribal backing. Thus, it is strong to the east of Falluja and on the road to Abu Ghraib, because the Zawbaa tribe, based there, was active in its formation. Crisis Group observations, Anbar, January 2014.

<sup>51</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, military council member, Falluja, 13 January 2014.

<sup>52</sup> See declarations at [www.facebook.com/gmcir1?ref=stream](http://www.facebook.com/gmcir1?ref=stream) and [twitter.com/militarycouncil](http://twitter.com/militarycouncil).

<sup>53</sup> Crisis Group observations, Anbar, January 2014.

<sup>54</sup> The Council's most prominent tribal leaders are the heads of the Jumeila and Muhandi tribes, from the city centre, the eastern district of Gurma and northern Saqlawya and Khaledya.

<sup>55</sup> The 1920 Brigades is a nationalist militia led by a cleric with an affinity for the Muslim Brotherhood, Harith al-Dhari, and his son Muthanna. The Naqshabandi Army, also nationalist, is led by Izzat al-Duri, an ex-senior official under Saddam and reputed Sufi. Both were established in the early days of the U.S. occupation, include former army officers and have a similar agenda of toppling the government, rewriting the constitution and establishing a new political system without sectarian and ethnic quotas. Crisis Group Reports, *In Their Own Words*, p. 2; and *Make or Break*, p. 22, both op. cit.

federal region. Several largely incompatible religious affiliations coexist within the council, ranging from Muslim Brotherhood, to Sufi, to Salafi trends.

These affiliations and preoccupations notwithstanding, the collective has been able to work together in Falluja. A fighter explained: "There are different groups but each tries to contribute as a member of the council rather than as a member of his own faction".<sup>56</sup> Members agreed on the collective's functions and distributed roles. Former military officers lead in security and military matters; clerics and tribal leaders manage and coordinate activities such as the provision of aid to civilians and the recruitment of young volunteers.<sup>57</sup> All seem to agree on keeping the government and the army out of the city, while managing its public affairs.<sup>58</sup> Some add a grander aspiration: gradually extending the council's reach beyond central Falluja and ultimately, in their parlance, "liberating" Baghdad.<sup>59</sup>

That said, Falluja has its fault lines. In the April 2013 provincial elections, the IIP-affiliated Muttahidun list emerged as the dominant political force in the Anbar governorate. It gained a majority of seats in the provincial council, giving it significant leverage over the appointment of mayors and police chiefs, throughout Anbar in general and in Falluja in particular.<sup>60</sup> The rise of the IIP marginalised the city's urban leadership, excluding it from administrative and security decisions on the provincial and local levels. New IIP-affiliated officials were appointed as mayor/district head (*qai'maqam*) and police chief (Aissa Thaimen and Lt. Colonel Aziz al-Mohammadi respectively). The local police recruited former combatants from Hamas Iraq, an IIP-affiliated armed group, and tribesmen from the city's outskirts.<sup>61</sup>

IIP's rise exacerbated longstanding tensions between the city's urban elite, marginalised by U.S.-promoted de-Baathification policies, and the tribes living on the outskirts.<sup>62</sup> However, its popularity did not last long. Championing of negotiations and

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<sup>56</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, 20 January 2014.

<sup>57</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, Falluja fighter, 20 January 2014. After distributing food aid in Falluja in mid-January, ICRC employees said tribal leaders efficiently managed the logistics. Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 20 January 2014.

<sup>58</sup> Crisis Group telephone interviews, 8-20 January 2014.

<sup>59</sup> A fighter said, "we are working to recruit and arm the tribes' members in other Sunni provinces as well as the capital's outskirts. Our focus remains Baghdad. We control the strategic entrance to the city. We are waiting for the decisive battle, in which we enter Baghdad and bring down the government". Crisis Group telephone interview, 20 January 2014.

<sup>60</sup> The "Law of Governorates Not Incorporated Into a Region", adopted in 2008 and amended in 2010, accords the governor and provincial councils significant influence over selection and dismissal of police chiefs for governorates and districts, with interior ministry approval. Provincial councils must approve by absolute majority three of five candidates put forward by the governor; the interior minister then appoints one of the three (Article 7). Law 21 regulates appointment through elections in administrative units, though elections were never held; district and sub-district leaders have tended to be appointed by a majority of the provincial council.

<sup>61</sup> Hamas Iraq is a splinter group that broke off from the 1920 Revolution Brigades in 2007. Crisis Group Reports, *In Their Own Words* and *Iraq After the Surge I*, both op. cit. Aissa Thaimen, Falluja's mayor, is an IIP member; local police chief Lt. Colonel Aziz al-Mohammadi was a high-ranking figure in Hamas Iraq; many of Falluja's high- and mid-ranking police were previously active in Hamas Iraq; many lower ranks were recruited, after 2009, from IIP-affiliated members of the Albu Issa and Albu Alwan tribes living on the city's outskirts. These tribes and their members are highly dependent on police pay, without which they would live off subsistence agriculture. Crisis Group observation, Anbar, January 2014.

<sup>62</sup> A revealing example of this cleavage is how members of the educated urban leadership use the denigrating epithet of *'arab* [rural, rustic] to refer to inhabitants of the outskirts, who live mostly on subsistence farming. Crisis Group telephone interview, Feurat al-Ani, Falluja journalist, 28 March 2014.

rapprochement with the government, belittling of popular demands and denigration of protesters as radicals alienated residents. Attempts to reinvigorate Falluja's *sahwat* councils, Anbar's weakest,<sup>63</sup> had the same result.

Upon taking control of the city in the wake of ISIL's entry, the military council expelled the IIP-affiliated mayor and police chief. Other police officers, fearing retribution, laid low. Council members view Muttahidun officials and their associates as "government agents" bent on "sabotaging the revolution", a fifth column helping the government "impose control over Anbar" in coordination with *Sahwat* "traitors".<sup>64</sup> A military council member said, "the Islamic Party should stop cooperating with the government at the expense of Falluja's people and the cause of Iraq's Sunnis. It would like to impose itself and its agenda on the whole of Anbar province. We will confront them strongly".<sup>65</sup>

The council and IIP have sought common ground on occasion. On 12 January, they agreed on compromise candidates to replace the IIP-affiliated mayor and police chief expelled by the council.<sup>66</sup> But both were targeted by ISIL and forced to flee the city; the threats derailed a possible rapprochement, not only between the groups but also between the city and the government, and marked the jihadis' emergence as a local political player, albeit a spoiler. After the flight of the compromise candidates, Muttahidun lawmaker Jaber al-Jaberi lamented: "We are trying to find solutions but al-Qaeda is in control of the city. They [the council and ISIL] don't like each other, but it is clear they have an alliance".<sup>67</sup>

### C. *Catch-22*

Falluja is not a natural haven for al-Qaeda. During its heyday, in 2005-2006, it was dominant in the city, but arrogance and brutality made it more enemies than friends. Homegrown armed groups and traditional tribal leaders soon mobilised to evict it. They resented al-Qaeda for empowering the lower economic classes, condemning tribal traditions as un-Islamic, subverting the mainstream local religious identity and undermining the insurgency's nationalist agenda.<sup>68</sup> A former senior officer who took the lead in this fight said to Crisis Group in 2007:

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<sup>63</sup> The *sahwa* never gained momentum in Falluja, whose most prominent tribes, the al-Jumeila and al-Muhanda, never joined. The most prominent *sahwa* leader in Falluja, Sheikh Aifan Issawi, was killed in a suicide bombing a year before the latest crisis began. Even the Albu Alwan and Albu Issa clans, closest to the government, preferred to join the police, not the *sahwat*. Crisis Group interview, national reconciliation ministry consultant, Baghdad, 13 January 2014.

<sup>64</sup> An ex-insurgent and military council member said, "Islamic Party members did not enter the military council, and we reject their presence in our ranks because they are agents of the government. They are working to see the revolution fail". Crisis Group telephone interview, Falluja, 13 January 2014. Several military council members accused Hamas Iraq militants of dressing as ISIL to justify government claims of an al-Qaeda presence in the city. A tribal leader and military council member said, "*sahwa* are government agents, traitors ... who work with Baghdad because of their paychecks". Crisis Group telephone interview, Falluja, 15 January 2014.

<sup>65</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, tribal chief and military council member, Baghdad, 9 January 2014.

<sup>66</sup> In mid-January, government-fostered negotiations between the Muttahidun and military council officials led to the appointment of Zabar Abdul Hadi al-Irsan as mayor and Mohammed Alewy al-Issawi as police chief. *Al-Iraq News*, 12 January 2014.

<sup>67</sup> Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 17 January 2014.

<sup>68</sup> Al-Qaeda recruits among workers, rural immigrants and landed peasants, among other marginal groups. See Crisis Group Report, *Iraq After the Surge I*, op. cit., pp. 2-10.

Al-Qaeda seized the town from its real owners. Jihadis killed our tribal leaders, imams, doctors and schoolteachers. They killed our police and kidnapped our families, so much so that people who had lived here for generations were forced to leave their city. And al-Qaeda's agenda itself was alien to us.<sup>69</sup>

In early 2014, the legacy of distrust and resentment was still palpable among tribal leaders, former insurgents and the public at large.<sup>70</sup> Nearly everyone felt al-Qaeda's presence meant trouble. City residents avoided direct confrontation with the jihadis but, keen to secure and announce their withdrawal to head off an army invasion, encouraged them to vacate central districts. A military council member declared: "There is no al-Qaeda here. The city is under the control of its residents. The government claims the opposite because it wants a massacre here under the pretext that the city is controlled by terrorists".<sup>71</sup>

Ideological and religious differences notwithstanding, the city has been driven to adopt a more pragmatic approach to the jihadis. The army siege highlighted Falluja's shortage of funds and weapons, of which ISIL has a relative abundance owing to its activities in Syria.<sup>72</sup> A fighter from Anbar remarked: "In the event of an Iraqi army attack, the military council would not stand even a day with the arms we have. Daash [by contrast] has already proven its ability to take over and hold Falluja's suburbs".<sup>73</sup> As army shelling increased at the end of January, the council invited ISIL into areas from which it had withdrawn early in the month as a buffer against a military assault.<sup>74</sup> A fighter recounted: "At the start everyone rejected ISIL's presence in the city, and its militants pulled back accordingly. But as pressure increased on residential quarters, we needed their help to prevent an army breakthrough".<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p. 3. A tribal sheikh from Falluja concurred: "Al-Qaeda messed everything up, killed and expelled innocent people. They planted the seeds of sectarianism and sedition. They came from outside and intoxicated deranged souls who started to rampage and kill their own nation". Ibid, p. 13; and on the tribes' rejection of al-Qaeda, *ibid*, pp. 10-16.

<sup>70</sup> In late 2013, a tribal leader, who soon became a military council member, said, "there is no future for Daash in Falluja. We are fighting a battle on two fronts, against the government and against Daash". Crisis Group telephone interview, Falluja, 27 December 2013. A former senior army officer, who fought against the U.S. occupation and later fought al-Qaeda beside the U.S., said, "today there isn't much support for the resistance factions that struggled against the U.S. Instead al-Qaeda is getting stronger and stronger, for lack of other options. But still, we cannot work with them. They are radical, implement an imported vision and do not pay much attention to the interests of Iraq, or of Iraq's Sunnis for that matter". Crisis Group interview, Istanbul, 3 October 2013. An unemployed agricultural engineer from Falluja expressed a widely held view al-Qaeda is allied with the government and Iran. "People here want to make a living and live in security. They [ISIL] cannot provide any of this. They bring problems and divisions and no solutions whatsoever. We know full well Daash is infiltrated by Iran and Daash and the government coordinate their operations". Crisis group Interview, Falluja, 10 October 2013.

<sup>71</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, 7 January 2014.

<sup>72</sup> A former insurgent said, "first we gave them [al-Qaeda] assistance [in the early stages of the Iraqi insurgency], then they started to kill us, and we fought them. But we can easily revert to cooperating with them if the government pursues its sectarian policy of targeting Sunni Arabs and denying them their rights". Crisis Group interview, Falluja, 10 October 2013.

<sup>73</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, Falluja, 27 January 2014.

<sup>74</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, Falluja, 27 January 2014. On 26 January, as the army tried to force its way into the southern district of Naymiya, a key entrance to the city, the council and ISIL joined to block it. Crisis Group observations, Falluja, 27 January 2014.

<sup>75</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, Falluja, 27 January 2014.

The council, reluctant to endorse ISIL participation in its decisions, attempted to limit the jihadis to military affairs. It was agreed that ISIL militants would join the council only in individual capacities, not as representatives of the movement. They were forbidden from imposing their views and promoting the imposition of Sharia (Islamic law), from targeting state officials or former *sahwa* members as well as their properties, and from raising al-Qaeda flags. In principle, the agreement placed them squarely under the authority of the military council.<sup>76</sup>

Yet, it also left the council militarily dependent on ISIL and with no real means of checking the group. Today the jihadis face few constraints, and the very fact of their participation in the council serves to vindicate and legitimise the government's claims of a takeover.<sup>77</sup> The city finds itself in a vicious circle: the more the army shells it, the more indispensable ISIL's military capacity becomes; yet the more ISIL is drawn into the city's defence, the more indiscriminately military pressure can be applied.

In early April, as the army increased pressure, again threatening an assault, ISIL decisively gained the upper hand. With the government's February plan to end the crisis in Falluja little more than ink on paper,<sup>78</sup> the jihadis in effect have become the final voice in both military operations and civil management. An Anbar resident with close ties to the military council said:

Military and civilian leadership is shared between ISIL, military council tribal figures and former officers. But ISIL has the last word due to their military supremacy. Falluja's [military council] officers and tribal leaders feel they got nothing out of the government's nominal concessions; the alliance with ISIL at least feeds their hope that they could achieve a military victory and ultimately reach and liberate Baghdad.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> "We accept the Islamic State [ISIL] as individuals within the military council. They are not expected to engage in any of the military council's decisions; nor do we want them to appear overtly in Falluja. They will be no more than fighters alongside others fighters in Falluja". Crisis Group telephone interview, Falluja fighter, 27 January 2014.

<sup>77</sup> Admitting the downside of the of the council's embrace of ISIL, a fighter in Falluja said, "this move might have been suicidal. Now that ISIL is all-in, we fear the government will fund *sahwa* councils among Falluja's tribes and, perhaps, ultimately split the city in two. Or worse, it will strike Falluja come what may, pretending that it is entirely under ISIL control". Crisis Group telephone interview, Falluja, 27 January 2014.

<sup>78</sup> In February, the Council of Ministers approved Maliki's plan to end the Anbar crisis. This consisted of setting up a committee to cooperate with Anbar's provincial council on compensation for damages to private and public property, integrating tribes that fought with the army against ISIL into police and amnesty for senior army officers who stood with the government against ISIL. See *al-Iraq News*, 18 February 2014.

<sup>79</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview. Falluja, 3 April 2014. Having won no concessions from the government, the military council has little hope other than for a military victory in cooperation with ISIL. An Anbar resident with close ties to it lamented: "The government established regiments of 7,000 and 10,000 tribal members from Anbar, but these included only those already close to the government and none of the military council. Similarly, despite negotiations, former officers were not reintegrated into the army. They got nothing from the government so now they are looking to benefit temporarily from Daash, then break the alliance later on". Crisis Group telephone interview, 10 April 2014.

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## IV. Conclusion

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The crisis in Falluja, a product of the city's unique circumstances, has come to have enormous consequences for Iraq as a whole. The situation stems, first and foremost, from the government's desire to monopolise state institutions and resources. In what has become a familiar pattern, Baghdad has played up al-Qaeda's role so as to justify dealing with a political challenge through resort to arms.<sup>80</sup> The international community, by and large, has backed this approach, in part because it sees the current crisis as an opportunity to deal another blow to al-Qaeda. The risk is that this strategy will empower the opposition's most radical voices. There is evidence this already is occurring.

This is not to downplay the threat al-Qaeda poses. It is a dangerous presence in Iraq, one that seems poised to grow further, given that it feeds off political division, violence and misery that are legion in the country in general and Anbar in particular. Even the jihadis' ostensible allies express deep alienation from them, acknowledging that their alliance is one of convenience and necessity, not essential compatibility. But the government, instead of taking advantage of these tensions to split them apart, has deepened their cooperation.

Baghdad had a strong incentive to do so. On the eve of the parliamentary elections, the prime minister's belligerent stance has rallied much of the domestic opposition to his side and boosted his international standing.<sup>81</sup> The Sunni Muttahidun electoral list followed his lead. While its national figures in Baghdad firmly criticise government military operations, officials associated with it in Anbar are standing with the government. As a result, electoral politics has become little more than choosing sides. As a member of the Ahrar bloc, a Shiite current critical of the prime minister, put it, politics in Iraq today has been reduced to whether one is with or against

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<sup>80</sup> Such tactics were successful in the past. Thus, in 2010, the increase in al-Qaeda-related attacks in Sunni-populated governorates gave the government cause to deploy additional troops there. Their extensive presence did not improve security but consolidated Maliki's hold by pressuring local Sunni officials to yield prerogatives to the government, eg, for police and civil service appointments and project approval. Maria Fantappie, "Nouri al-Maliki attempts to bolster his power by looking to the provinces", *Los Angeles Times*, 13 July 2013; and Crisis Group Middle East Report N°127, *Iraq's Secular Opposition: The Rise and the Decline of Al-Iraqiya*, 31 July 2012. A State of Law official declared: "We are confident we will win. We are already collecting documents proving the affiliation of Sunni politicians with al-Qaeda, and we are determined to unveil this before the elections". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 10 October 2013.

<sup>81</sup> The Special Representative for Iraq of the UN Secretary-General stressed at the "First International Counter-Terrorism Conference" on 12 March 2014 that "addressing terrorism through an exclusive military response won't be enough", while praising the government for doing precisely that: "Today, no country is immune from the threat of terrorism or from its effects. Iraq's people understand very well what this means. Every day, Iraqi men, women, girls and boys suffer death, injuries, disabilities and destruction of livelihoods from violence perpetrated by terrorists who reject the vision of Iraq as a strong, vibrant, and inclusive democracy .... I would like to honour the brave men and women of the Iraqi Security Forces who risk their lives every day to protect citizens from the threat of terrorism – often at a terrible cost to themselves and their families. As we speak, armed groups seek to provoke a vicious cycle of violence .... They target community leaders, journalists, and government officials; they attack religious pilgrims and places of worship; they go after school-children. Their aim is to incite communal conflict; their goal is to make Iraq ungovernable". [www.uniraq.org/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=1720:speech-of-the-special-representative-of-the-united-nations-secretary-general-for-iraq-in-the-first-international-counter-terrorism-conference&Itemid=606&lang=en](http://www.uniraq.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=1720:speech-of-the-special-representative-of-the-united-nations-secretary-general-for-iraq-in-the-first-international-counter-terrorism-conference&Itemid=606&lang=en).

al-Qaeda: "Iraqis and the international community agree that the army and government must defeat terrorism. But defeating terrorism shouldn't have anything to do with Maliki per se. He's failed at everything, and now he wants to use the war on terror to credit himself".<sup>82</sup>

The strategy worked. Shiite factions, fearful of being caught on the wrong side of Maliki's war against Sunni terror, closed ranks.<sup>83</sup> The Sunni leadership is more than ever fractured and dysfunctional and has thrown in its lot with Baghdad; Muttahidun has gone so far as to claim that Falluja had fallen into the hands of "criminals".<sup>84</sup> Increasingly dependent on the central government's largesse, it has grown less accountable; as a result, the divide between Sunni politicians and their ostensible constituents has grown. These splits have enabled the prime minister to avoid, to a certain extent, the sectarianism charge, at least internationally.<sup>85</sup>

The revival of ISIL, the other ostensible winner from the country's polarisation, is not likely to last. Over the past year, the movement has stepped up its activities and now plays an outsized role in Anbar,<sup>86</sup> but it is unlikely to put down lasting roots. Its star is rising as a consequence of the Sunni impasse,<sup>87</sup> but ISIL has no means to overcome that impasse. Although it may help fend off the government, its targeting of alleged apostates and collaborators promotes more discord than unity among Sunni constituencies.<sup>88</sup> It offers nothing achievable, only the utopian goal of establishing an Islamic state, an agenda that has garnered virtually no local buy-in and has backfired time and again.

The elections – scheduled to proceed despite the virtual state of war in Anbar – will not solve Iraq's problems. Instead of garnering legitimacy for the government

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<sup>82</sup> Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 13 January 2014.

<sup>83</sup> For statements by rival Shiite factions endorsing, to varying degrees, the "war on terror", see *Al Iraq News*, 10 January 2014; and [jawabna.com/index.php/permalink/7182.html](http://jawabna.com/index.php/permalink/7182.html).

<sup>84</sup> A Muttahidun lawmaker from Anbar said, "our problem is not Maliki. Maliki might leave after the elections, but now we are confronting criminals in Falluja". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 16 January 2014. Despite criticising government operations in Anbar, Muttahidun endorsed the government narrative of a struggle against terrorism, as a way to boost consensus in Ramadi before the elections. This also created the opportunity for IIP-affiliated officials in Anbar to act as interlocutors, thereby gaining leverage over the government. Faleh al-Issawi, a Muttahidun member of the Anbar provincial council, supported the government's plan to recruit 10,000 members to Ramadi's local police, saying: "the next will be to hand over the security file to the local police after the withdrawal of military forces, which gradually cleanse and ensure all areas are free of terrorism". *Al-Mada*, 16 March 2014.

<sup>85</sup> U.S. and UN officials pointed to the government-Muttahidun negotiations in Anbar as evidence the government was trying to solve the crisis politically, though at the same time they acknowledged that the restrictions it imposed deprived them of a clear picture. Crisis Group interviews, Baghdad, 20 January 2014; U.S. official, Washington, 26 February 2014.

<sup>86</sup> For instance, in early April, it extended its territorial reach as far as the Naymiya Dam on Baghdad's outskirts, from where it took control of the Euphrates River and cut water to some southern and central Iraq provinces. See [justpaste.it/Falluja-W](http://justpaste.it/Falluja-W).

<sup>87</sup> On 7 January, ISIL's leader, Abu Mohammed al-Adnani, said in a recorded message: "Sunnis of Iraq, a year ago you began peaceful protests. We warned you then that non-violent tactics wouldn't work with the *rawafidh* [a derogatory term for Shiites]. We told you that they would force you to fight, and that is what has now happened. In spite of all the scholars and clerics inside and outside Iraq who told you to avoid violence, now you have picked up weapons against your own will".

<sup>88</sup> "We call on all *sahwat*, all politicians and all within the police and military to immediately renounce these affiliations and declare themselves innocent of these bodies. All who do so before we lay our hands on them will be spared, but all who do not will be at the top of the target list, our mujahidin will eliminate them, destroy their houses". *Ibid*.

and securing a mandate for the winner, they are further alienating the vast majority of the Sunni minority from Iraq's central authorities. Candidates were barely able to campaign in Anbar;<sup>89</sup> more than half the province's eligible voters are displaced across the country;<sup>90</sup> there are no voting centres in Falluja, and in most of the province's polling stations, there will be no external observers, only police and army.<sup>91</sup> As a result, high abstention, whether voluntary or enforced, and opportunities for manipulation are expected. A government critic said:

I am not going to vote. Why should I go to vote for someone who is going to serve his own interests and profit from his position? In Anbar, people are fed up. We don't have trust in candidates and only those who have close family members competing will go to vote.<sup>92</sup>

While the prime minister's strategy may win him a third term, it will come at the country's expense.

A more effective way for the government to respond to al-Qaeda's threat would be to bring a wide array of Sunnis into the fight. That would mean investing in the city's self-identification as a bulwark against foreign meddling, thus creating conditions for the city itself to lead the struggle against jihadis. Falluja's military council and ISIL have different objectives. That creates a fault line the government, if so inclined, could exploit to sunder their alliance. The council, unlike the jihadis, aims at protecting Anbar's security and negotiating a larger share of power within the state. Were it to achieve that, it would have little reason to continue cooperation with ISIL. Drawing Anbar's residents toward their Iraqi compatriots, Sunni and Shiite, would help insulate the country from the Syrian conflict, as opposed to pushing Falluja into a jihadi embrace. This is a lesson the international community needs to learn as well: focusing on the political conditions that enable the jihadis to gain ground, rather than encouraging a military campaign, would be a more effective strategy for achieving its stated goals.

Changing course would require, first and foremost, that the government distinguish between Falluja's rebels and ISIL fighters. To do so, Baghdad should make

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<sup>89</sup> A Falluja candidate said, "I have done most of my campaigning in the provinces where people from Anbar are displaced, in Erbil, Tikrit, Samarra. The security forces will be present outside the voting centres in Anbar, but we didn't have their protection to conduct our campaign in the province". Crisis Group telephone interview, 10 April 2014. A resident of al-Qaim reported: "In al-Qaim there was almost no electoral campaign. In the city there are many forces deployed – the Anbar Operation Command, the army's 7th division, federal police, local police, police border and SWAT – but still there was no security to organise a political gathering, electoral speeches in the city". Crisis Group interview, al-Qaim, 9 April 2014.

<sup>90</sup> Out of nearly 1.5 million residents (of whom 800,000 are eligible voters), more than 500,000 are currently displaced. The Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) spokesman said the displaced can vote in the districts to which they were displaced and that it has been delivering electronic voting cards to those who remain in place. Crisis Group telephone interview, Safaa al-Moussawi, 10 April 2014.

<sup>91</sup> On IHEC decisions on Anbar electoral process, see Associated Press, 8 April 2014. An Iraqi political analyst who followed the election process in Anbar said, "an Anbar resident, even if willing to vote, will have to risk his life to reach the polls. The vote can be easily corrupted since voting centres will be surrounded by Iraqi army, federal police and police forces who could easily exert pressure on voters or change the results in league with representatives of the various lists". Crisis Group telephone interview, Baghdad, 10 April 2014.

<sup>92</sup> Crisis Group interview, resident, al-Qaim, 10 April 2010. He added that in an illustration of the popular disdain for elections in Anbar, most elections posters had been torn down.

clear that its fight is with the latter, not the former; refrain from attacks and relieve other kinds of pressure on the city (such as by allowing humanitarian agencies to access the city); pledge to keep the army outside city limits; and support the entire city and all its tribal elements, on the condition they take the lead in ousting the jihadis. This would have the benefit of encouraging unity among Anbar's Sunni leadership rather than frustrating it, as the government has done by selecting privileged clients and bestowing largesse upon them – for instance by recruiting police from among them or allocating funds to them in return for their allegiance.

Sunni groups have been all too willing to play along with the government's divide-and-rule strategy. Should this communal competition continue, the election gambit risks becoming an open-ended intra-Sunni struggle.<sup>93</sup> The military council and Muttahidun, rather than vilifying each other, should work together on crucial tasks, such as securing public order; selecting a new mayor and police chief; and demanding that the government boost police and tribal *sahwat* forces that, if they cooperated, likely could evict al-Qaeda. Chief responsibility for unifying Sunni ranks, however, lies with the community itself. This is essential for crafting a strategy of positive engagement with the national political process that might enable Sunnis to negotiate, at the central government level, greater authority for their provincial bodies and authorities (eg, provincial council, governor) to manage their own political and security affairs.<sup>94</sup>

Iraq needs genuine reconciliation and integration, but the election campaign has pushed it in precisely the other direction. It has not been an exercise in national unity, but rather an occasion for the government to seek its mandate by opposite means. Baghdad has used the polls to set Sunnis against Shiites, and Sunnis against Sunnis, in the name of battling terror and al-Qaeda. The irony is that these goals are not mutually exclusive: Iraq could yet have far more success in fighting extremism were it to do so as a unified polity.

**Baghdad/Brussels, 28 April 2014**

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<sup>93</sup> For instance, on 16 March, Ahmed Abu Richa, a tribal leader close to the Muttahidun, declared his intention to unite the army, Ramadi's police and tribes in joint operations against Falluja's rebels. National Iraqi News, 16 March 2014.

<sup>94</sup> "The Law of Governorates Not Incorporated Into a Region" already provides the basis for this.

Appendix A: Map of Iraq



## Appendix B: About the International Crisis Group

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The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 150 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a twelve-page monthly bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in all the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on the website, [www.crisisgroup.org](http://www.crisisgroup.org). Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policy-makers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by former U.S. Undersecretary of State and Ambassador Thomas Pickering. Its President and Chief Executive since July 2009 has been Louise Arbour, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and Chief Prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda.

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**April 2014**

## Appendix C: Reports and Briefings on the Middle East and North Africa since 2011

### Israel/Palestine

*Gaza: The Next Israeli-Palestinian War?*, Middle East Briefing N°30, 24 March 2011 (also available in Hebrew and Arabic).

*Radical Islam in Gaza*, Middle East/North Africa Report N°104, 29 March 2011 (also available in Arabic and Hebrew).

*Palestinian Reconciliation: Plus Ça Change ...*, Middle East Report N°110, 20 July 2011 (also available in Arabic and Hebrew).

*Curb Your Enthusiasm: Israel and Palestine after the UN*, Middle East Report N°112, 12 September 2011 (also available in Arabic and Hebrew).

*Back to Basics: Israel's Arab Minority and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, Middle East Report N°119, 14 March 2012 (also available in Arabic).

*The Emperor Has No Clothes: Palestinians and the End of the Peace Process*, Middle East Report N°122, 7 May 2012 (also available in Arabic).

*Light at the End of their Tunnels? Hamas & the Arab Uprisings*, Middle East Report N°129, 14 August 2012 (also available in Arabic).

*Israel and Hamas: Fire and Ceasefire in a New Middle East*, Middle East Report N°133, 22 November 2012 (also available in Arabic).

*Extreme Makeover? (I): Israel's Politics of Land and Faith in East Jerusalem*, Middle East Report N°134, 20 December 2012 (also available in Arabic and Hebrew).

*Extreme Makeover? (II): The Withering of Arab Jerusalem*, Middle East Report N°135, 20 December 2012 (also available in Arabic and Hebrew).

*Buying Time? Money, Guns and Politics in the West Bank*, Middle East Report N°142, 29 May 2013 (also available in Arabic).

*Leap of Faith: Israel's National Religious and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, Middle East Report N°147, 21 November 2013 (also available in Arabic and Hebrew).

*The Next Round in Gaza*, Middle East Report N°149, 25 March 2014 (also available in Arabic).

*Revolution*, Middle East Report N°108, 6 July 2011 (also available in Arabic).

*Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (VII): The Syrian Regime's Slow-motion Suicide*, Middle East Report N°109, 13 July 2011 (also available in Arabic).

*Lebanon's Palestinian Dilemma: The Struggle Over Nahr al-Bared*, Middle East Report N°117, 1 March 2012 (also available in Arabic).

*Now or Never: A Negotiated Transition for Syria*, Middle East Briefing N°32, 5 March 2012 (also available in Arabic and Russian).

*Syria's Phase of Radicalisation*, Middle East Briefing N°33, 10 April 2012 (also available in Arabic).

*Lost in Transition: The World According to Egypt's SCAF*, Middle East/North Africa Report N°121, 24 April 2012 (also available in Arabic).

*Syria's Mutating Conflict*, Middle East Report N°128, 1 August 2012 (also available in Arabic).

*Tentative Jihad: Syria's Fundamentalist Opposition*, Middle East Report N°131, 12 October 2012 (also available in Arabic).

*A Precarious Balancing Act: Lebanon and the Syrian conflict*, Middle East Report N°132, 22 November 2012 (also available in Arabic).

*Syria's Kurds: A Struggle Within a Struggle*, Middle East Report N°136, 22 January 2013 (also available in Arabic and Kurdish).

*Too Close For Comfort: Syrians in Lebanon*, Middle East Report N°141, 13 May 2013 (also available in Arabic).

*Syria's Metastasising Conflicts*, Middle East Report N°143, 27 June 2013 (also available in Arabic).

*Marching in Circles: Egypt's Dangerous Second Transition*, Middle East/North Africa Briefing N°35, 7 August 2013 (also available in Arabic).

*Anything But Politics: The State of Syria's Political Opposition*, Middle East Report N°146, 17 October 2013 (also available in Arabic).

### Egypt/Syria/Lebanon

*Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (I): Egypt Victorious?*, Middle East/North Africa Report N°101, 24 February 2011 (also available in Arabic).

*Uncharted Waters: Thinking Through Syria's Dynamics*, Middle East Briefing N°31, 24 November 2011 (also available in Arabic).

*Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (VI): The Syrian People's Slow-motion*

**North Africa**

*Popular Protests in North Africa and the Middle East (IV): Tunisia's Way*, Middle East/North Africa Report N°106, 28 April 2011 (also available in French).

*Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (V): Making Sense of Libya*, Middle East/North Africa Report N°107, 6 June 2011 (also available in Arabic).

*Holding Libya Together: Security Challenges after Qadhafi*, Middle East/North Africa Report N°115, 14 December 2011 (also available in Arabic).

*Tunisia: Combatting Impunity, Restoring Security*, Middle East/North Africa Report N°123, 9 May 2012 (only available in French).

*Tunisia: Confronting Social and Economic Challenges*, Middle East/North Africa Report N°124, 6 June 2012 (only available in French).

*Divided We Stand: Libya's Enduring Conflicts*, Middle East/North Africa Report N°130, 14 September 2012 (also available in Arabic).

*Tunisia: Violence and the Salafi Challenge*, Middle East/North Africa Report N°137, 13 February 2013 (also available in French and Arabic).

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*Tunisia's Borders: Jihadism and Contraband*, Middle East/North Africa Report N°148, 28 November 2013 (also available in Arabic and French).

**Iraq/Iran/Gulf**

*Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (II): Yemen between Reform and Revolution*, Middle East Report N°102, 10 March 2011 (also available in Arabic).

*Iraq and the Kurds: Confronting Withdrawal Fears*, Middle East Report N°103, 28 March 2011 (also available in Arabic and Kurdish).

*Popular Protests in North Africa and the Middle East (III): The Bahrain Revolt*, Middle East Report N°105, 4 April 2011 (also available in Arabic).

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*Failing Oversight: Iraq's Unchecked Government*, Middle East Report N°113, 26 September 2011 (also available in Arabic).

*Breaking Point? Yemen's Southern Question*, Middle East Report N°114, 20 October 2011 (also available in Arabic).

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*Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (IX): Dallying with Reform in a Divided*

*Jordan*, Middle East Report N°118, 12 March 2012 (also available in Arabic).

*Iraq and the Kurds: The High-Stakes Hydrocarbons Gambit*, Middle East Report N°120, 19 April 2012 (also available in Arabic).

*The P5+1, Iran and the Perils of Nuclear Brinkmanship*, Middle East Briefing N°34, 15 June 2012 (also available in Arabic).

*Yemen: Enduring Conflicts, Threatened Transition*, Middle East Report N°125, 3 July 2012 (also available in Arabic).

*Déjà Vu All Over Again: Iraq's Escalating Political Crisis*, Middle East Report N°126, 30 July 2012 (also available in Arabic).

*Iraq's Secular Opposition: The Rise and Decline of Al-Iraqiya*, Middle East Report N°127, 31 July 2012 (also available in Arabic).

*Spider Web: The Making and Unmaking of Iran Sanctions*, Middle East Report N°138, 25 February 2013 (also available in Farsi).

*Yemen's Military-Security Reform: Seeds of New Conflict?*, Middle East Report N°139, 4 April 2013 (also available in Arabic).

*Great Expectations: Iran's New President and the Nuclear Talks*, Middle East Briefing N°36, 13 August 2013 (also available in Farsi).

*Make or Break: Iraq's Sunnis and the State*, Middle East Report N°144, 14 August 2013 (also available in Arabic).

*Yemen's Southern Question: Avoiding a Breakdown*, Middle East Report N°145, 25 September 2013 (also available in Arabic).

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